CUXTON
Cuxton Parish Council
Serving our community

## Response to Boundary Commission Consultation Proposal

Cuxton Parish Council has found the current proposal to move Cuxton and Halling from a one councillor ward to a three councillor ward (Halling, Cuxton and Strood Riverside Ward) unacceptable. We accept that the current situation of one ward councillor cannot continue, but residents have expressed *'deep concern' (p13, 58)* about the impact of being joined with large parts of Strood. Below we will explain our objections to this proposal and make alternative proposals that we would find slightly more acceptable.

1. Halling, Cuxton and Strood Riverside (CHSR) Ward Proposal

1.1 Joining Cuxton and Halling to a large area of Strood that extends as far as Rochester Bridge creates a huge ward that tries to combine rural and urban areas that have little in common, contrary to criteria 2. Your report (p12, 56) states that the Parish Council have provided *'overwhelming evidence'* of the close connections between Cuxton and Halling. This cannot be said of the evidence provided by the 'Conservative group' to support the CHSR ward proposal. Cuxton Parish Council would suggest that people living in any rural area will need to go to local towns for shopping and other activities their village cannot provide and challenge the view that this means our rural and urban communities have much in common.

Although people from Cuxton may use the supermarkets and sport facilities in Strood there are now fewer banks there and many will use the wider shopping facilities in Bluewater and Hempstead Valley. Halling residents are more likely to use facilities in Snodland, Aylesford and Maidstone for shopping rather than travelling to Strood.

1.2 This large ward proposal has the potential for a conflict of interest when Councillors are dealing with what we believe are diverse communities with different priorities. There is a concern that the voice of Cuxton residents will be diminished and this will not promote effective or convenient local government.

1.3 One could suggest that this proposal divides roads and communities in Strood that have more in common with each other than with Cuxton and Halling and which would benefit from staying joined together, for example Maple, Sycamore and Cedar Roads.

1.4 The current proposal appears to benefit and be convenient for political parties rather than ordinary people. This may be a misconception, but it would have been helpful if the Parish Council had been engaged in discussion regarding a 2 or 3 Councillor Ward and which parts of Strood South we might best be joined with.

1.5 Some residents have expressed a concern that this proposal will result in Cuxton losing its rural status and our rural GPs losing their dispensing rights as a consequence. If this is correct, it will impact most on the elderly and disabled who will have to travel out of the village to collect prescriptions.

2. Other options

The Parish Council's preferred option is for 1 ward councillor for Halling and 1 for Cuxton.

**If** Cuxton and Halling cannot have 2 ward councillors because this will result in a high margin of electoral inequality, then there are other options that would be more acceptable to our community that we would like the Boundary Commission to consider.

The following assumptions have been made when undertaking our calculations:

- There will be 60 Ward Councillors
- Each Ward Councillor will have approximately 3663 of the electorate
- Cuxton and Halling electorate estimate for 2025 is 5316
- The new two member Ward proposal needs an electorate of between 6594 and 7326 to achieve the required level of electoral equality.

Cuxton Parish Council would like the Boundary Commission to give full consideration to the following options:

2.1 Cuxton, Halling and Medway Gate

Medway Gate is the first housing development accessed after the A228 crosses the Cuxton and Strood boundary and is contained within a well-defined chalk pit. Links exist with this community as over 40% of the children attending Cuxton Academy of Schools come from this area. These parents and children also use Cuxton shops and participate in local community groups (e.g. Scouts and football club). Some residents of Medway Gate also have family who live in Cuxton.

If Medway Gate were combined with Cuxton and Halling the total number of the electorate would be 6114.

2.2 Cuxton, Halling, Medway Gate and Temple Wharf

As the 2.1 proposal above falls short of an acceptable variance then the addition of Temple Wharf housing development has been considered.

Temple Wharf is another well-defined community between the railway line and the Medway River. Medway Valley Leisure Park lies between Temple Wharf and the adjacent M2 motorway bridge at the Cuxton Parish boundary. Residents from Cuxton, Medway Gate and Temple Wharf make use of many of the leisure facilities available on this site (restaurants, gym, bingo hall, cinema and more). Given the location of the new Temple Wharf housing development it is also likely that some of their children will attend Cuxton Academy of Schools rather than a school in Strood.

Cuxton Parish Council has long campaigned for a footpath and cycleway along the RS206 footpath in order to provide a safe walking and cycling route from Cuxton to Medway Valley Leisure Park and Strood town. (We understand that Medway Council have submitted a grant application to try and ensure this project finally comes to fruition). If this walking and cycle route proposal is successful it would provide a clear physical link between the Cuxton, Medway Gate and Temple Wharf.

If Medway Gate and Temple Wharf were combined with Cuxton and Halling the total number of the electorate would be 6784, which falls within the 10% acceptable

variance. This alternative Ward proposal could be called *Cuxton, Halling and Riverside Ward* and have 2 Ward Councillors.

This proposal also has benefits for Strood residents, as the community of Strood South would not be split and could be made in to a 3 member Ward with an estimated population of approximately 10800 (approximately 3600 electorate per Councillor). This fits very well with the criteria for a 3 member Ward.

Strood South is an established urban community with similar issues and interests and so should generate few conflicts of interest and facilitate effective management of the Ward for the Councillors.

2.3 Cuxton, Halling and Rochester West

The Parish Council spent a lot of time looking at other areas that might have the same rural concerns. The following proposal would join three very similar rural communities together. Part of Rochester West is rural and also bordered by the M2 motorway and the high speed rail train line, however, it is on the other side of the River Medway from Cuxton and Halling.

The Parish Council acknowledge that joining with this area may not be beneficial to the whole of Rochester West Ward as it may split a community that has a long history and established community connections.

2.4 Proposal from a resident

Appended to this letter is a proposal from a Cuxton resident that we feel has merit and is included as an alternative to the other options we have proposed. It also illustrates the concern residents have and the time and effort they have taken to find a solution that works for Cuxton and Halling as well as the Boundary Commission.

The Parish Council acknowledge that this proposal includes Wards with 4 Councillors which we understand is not possible under current regulations.

It is clear from the Boundary Commission Report that the concerns of Cuxton and Halling residents have been heard, however, the Parish Council cannot agree that the proposed Halling, Cuxton, and Strood Riverside Ward is the right move. The Parish Council see no need for a large 3 member Ward that includes a very large urban area that could make it difficult for our rural concerns to be heard.

Cuxton Parish Council hope that proposal 2.2 will be seen as a reasonable and acceptable alternative to that proposed by the Boundary Commission. The proposal demonstrates the links between the 4 communities (Cuxton, Halling, Medway Gate and Temple Wharf) and will also allow the communities in Strood to remain connected, in particular Strood South.

Cllr. Kay Hutchfield, Chairman, Cuxton Parish Council
For and on behalf of Cuxton Parish Council
August 2020

Rather than create new boundaries for each ward my suggestion would be to add the four councillors to existing wards and for that ward to be divided to suit each councillor.

This would save the considerable monies which would be involved in creating new boundaries for numerous existing wards.

The distribution of the four newly required councillors could be as follows

**Strood Rural** - increase from 3 to 4 councillors
This is a large area, some being rural, that could if found necessary be divided to suit.

**River** – increase from 2 to 3 councillors
Non rural area with no need for separation.

**Peninsular** – increase from 3 to 4 councillors
This is a very large area, mostly rural, that could if found necessary be divided to suit.

**Cuxton & Halling** – increase from 1 to 2 councillors
Rural area which could be divided into two separate wards

Living in Cuxton for some years now it is apparent that many residents are of the opinion that they are not served best by a councillor, that although works very hard, is not situated within Cuxton and that a representative that actually lived within the village could be more aware of the needs of the village.

Although this may not be the solution to suit all requirements it would certainly be one that required less finance. I have also been sadly advised that some are thinking of possibly joining Cuxton to a section of Strood, potentially undermining the current rural status of the village.
The parish of Cuxton comprises of a small village with a small group of outlying houses, there is no bus service to the outlying area of the parish and less than 2% of the Parish is occupied by domestic buildings. Given the lack of public transport and the high proportion of population without private transport (13%) and the low population density (335 people/$Km^2$) the parish of Cuxton must surely be classified as rural, with all the needs of a rural community and not those of a town namely Strood.